

THE  
**NATIONAL PREACHER.**

No. 2.

NEW-YORK, JULY, 1831.

VOL. 6.

**SERMONS CVI. & CVII.**

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**EARLY PIETY.**

1 SAMUEL, iii. 19.—*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him.*

THE celebrated lamentation of David over Absalom, his son, has often been alluded to as a striking example of parental affection. It is indeed striking. But perhaps it is surpassed by another passage in the same narrative, less frequently appealed to—his question, *Is the young man Absalom safe?* This unnatural son, with an ingratitude which would be incredible were it not so exceedingly common, had raised a rebellion against his father, and, with the double turpitude of a traitorous subject and an undutiful son, had levied war upon his parent and his king. After a long period of suspense and anxiety, a great battle is fought; a messenger comes with tidings of the result; David meets him eagerly,—and with what question? Does he ask, *Has my army been victorious?* is my government established? are my kingdom and my country saved? No. As every other parent would have done in similar circumstances, he merges every other feeling in that of interest for his son. No matter about my government—no matter about my country—no matter whether friends or enemies have been victorious. The only question which the eager parent could utter was, “*Is the young man Absalom safe?*”

This is human nature. It portrays the strength of the affection by which God has bound the parent to the child. This is, perhaps, the strongest feeling of the human heart. How early does it begin to operate! how does it stand uninjured by the thousand shocks which it receives, not chilled by unkindness, not weakened by time!

And yet this affection is not founded in *reasoning*. It is not founded in *gratitude*. The son is not the friend and protector of the father to such a degree as to awaken this attachment in the parent's heart. The protection and the benefits flow all the *other way*. We might have expected that *filial affection* would be strong, being based upon gratitude and a sense of dependence, and that if indifference should be manifested at all, it would be the parent's indifference towards the child. But no. The coldness is always on the part of those who *receive* the favors. It is the hearts of those who *bestow* them which glow unceasingly with affection and love.

Whence comes, then, this feeling so strong and so unaccountable? God has engraved it upon the human heart; and by doing this, he has communicated his intention, *that the parent should be, to a great degree, responsible for the welfare and happiness of the child*. By fixing this feeling so indelibly in the heart, he has meant to be understood as *reposing a trust*, as *assigning a duty*. He

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might easily have so formed the race, that each individual would have been ushered into existence without the long period of helplessness and dependence. But it is not so; every human being *must have* for many years a human friend; and by the strength of that parental love which he has implanted, God has declared who he wishes that friend to be, and what duties he wishes him to perform.

I shall take it for granted that all the parents whom I now address are aware of the greatness of the obligation under which they are thus placed. I shall presume that they are satisfied, that among the innumerable connections which exist in this world between mind and mind, there is not one which exhibits more influence on the one side, and more dependence on the other, than that which binds the parent to the child. Consequently, if there shall be a single case on the great day in which the blood of a ruined soul shall be required at the hands of its watchman, that case may be expected to be one of a child lost through the neglect of its father or its mother.

Supposing, then, that these things have been fully considered, and that your only wish is to discover the best way of fulfilling your duties as guardians of the spiritual and eternal interests of your children, I proceed to present some considerations of a directly practical tendency.

And here let me call your attention to the words of the text: "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." *And the Lord was with him!* This points out the nature of the duty which you have to discharge. It is to secure for the hearts of your children *the presence and the influence of the Lord Jehovah*. Now, if children are willing to come to God, God will come to them. Your object, therefore, is to lead, to win, to allure them to their Maker and their Savior.

In pursuing this subject, I shall aim at the following objects:—

I. To describe the way by which you may endeavor to win the hearts of your children to God.

II. To caution you against some dangers which will lie in the path.

III. To urge you to fidelity in the discharge of these duties.

In entering upon the discussion of the first topic, I must remark, that the time which limits me requires that I should now speak only of the *first* efforts for this purpose—the instructions given in the *earliest* years—when the light of the intellect and the conscience is just beginning to dawn. The task of watching the mind and giving direction to its powers at this period devolves chiefly upon mothers. I address myself, therefore, principally to them; and if I mean to be clearly understood, I shall be under the necessity of resorting to a familiarity of illustration which, on ordinary subjects, is not necessary in the pulpit. This, I hope, will be readily excused.

I would also remark, that parents cannot take a single step to advantage in endeavoring to train up their children to piety, without first obtaining their *unlimited, unqualified, entire submission* to their authority. The *very first* lesson to be taught the child is to *submit, to obey*. There are various methods of obtaining this ascendancy. In some cases it is to be done by kindness, in some cases by severity; but in some way or other it *must be done*. Your children must be habituated to do what you command, and to refrain from what you forbid; not because they can see the reason for it, but because you *command or forbid*; submission, not to your *reasons*, but to your *authority*. If a child is in the habit of disregarding parental injunctions,—if it is necessary to repeat them,—or if obedience is slow, or reluctant, or ill-humored,—I mean if this is so *habitually*,—there is something radically wrong in the parent's management. No parent can, under such circumstances, expect success in any

efforts to promote piety; for be it remembered, insubordination is the essence of irreligion. I repeat it—*insubordination is the very essence of irreligion.* Men are not willing to submit to God. \* The mother, therefore, who habitually tolerates, and thus encourages disobedience in any of its forms, and yet hopes for success in her religious instructions, is pulling down with one hand while she is endeavoring to build up with the other; and judge ye how the edifice of piety will advance under such circumstances.\*

But some one will say, I shall alienate the affections of my children by governing them with too strong a hand. Never. There never was a child alienated from a parent by means of a steady, just, and efficient government. If you seek for a family of alienated hearts, you will find it where government is lax and obedience never required: and peace, and happiness, and mutual affection reign where parental authority is most highly maintained. It is so with men as well as with children. There never was a commander more popular among his soldiery than Napoleon; and was his a flexible or a trembling arm? No. Be kind and uniform, and act, not from irritation or momentary impulse, but from steady principle, and you need not fear; but if this part of your duty is neglected, there is no hope for the rest. If your child is ungoverned at your fireside, the question of salvation or ruin is as much a matter of mere chance, that is, as much under the control of circumstances, fortuitous so far as human agency is concerned, as any thing can be which takes place in this world.

The ascendancy above described being obtained,—the great duty which you have to discharge is to establish and to maintain a constant intercourse between the heart of your little one and its Maker. A child is capable of maintaining this intercourse, and of enjoying the happiness which springs from it, at a very early period; perhaps before it is old enough to understand half of the fundamental truths of the gospel. There are some truths, indeed, which must be fully comprehended and felt, as a preparatory step. If these are understood, the child may be a child of prayer; his morning and evening offering may ascend acceptably to God, from a renewed spirit, while in regard to many of the great truths of the Christian dispensation he is entirely unformed.

One of the first subjects to be presented to the mind of the child, is its dependence on its Creator for life and all that it enjoys. And this is to be impressed, not by making general statements, but by pointing to particular facts.

\* It is important that precisely what I mean by obedience should be understood. A mother sees a child playing with something which it ought not to have, and commands him to bring it to her:—

"Oh, mother, I want it," says the child, turning with an imploring look towards its parent.

"I cannot help that—you must bring it to me."

"Why," says the child, "do let me keep it a little while."

"No," insists the mother, "you must bring it to me immediately."

"Well," says the child, yielding a little, "I will go and put it where I got it."

"No," repeats the parent, slowly and decidedly, "I tell you that you must bring it directly to me."

The child advances towards the mother at last, and reluctantly allows the plaything to be taken out of its hand.

This, now, is the kind of obedience which, it is to be feared, a vast number even of Christian parents exact from their children; but it is not obedience—it is gross disobedience and contempt of parental authority. The mother who is accustomed to see such slow, and reluctant, and tardy compliance with her wishes, may be sure, either that she is entirely ignorant of her duty as a mother, or else that she greatly neglects it. Until those who are under your care obey your commands with cordial and ready alacrity, you may be sure that the first step in Christian education is not yet taken.

Direct his notice to his beating pulse, and let him observe that he has no power over its movements, and while his attention is absorbed by the subject, say to him ; " You cannot live unless your pulse continues to beat. It is God who keeps it in motion. If he lets it stop you will die." Or interrupt his breathing for a moment, and let him notice the inconvenience and suffering occasioned. Then say ; " If your breathing should cease for a little longer time, you would die ; and who is it that continues it while you sleep ?" A few simple instances of this kind will make a far more vivid and permanent impression upon the mind of a child, than any labored and general description of our dependence upon the Creator.

The next truth to be taught the child as a preparation for leading it habitually to God in prayer, is that this Being is *holy*, and that he is consequently displeased with sin. This too, like the former, is not to be *first taught* by the general language of a creed or a catechism ; for this language, however logical and accurate, and however valuable for other purposes, is not suitable for *first communicating the idea*. The child must obtain its conceptions of sin by first looking at a particular and striking instance. The first step is to make it feel that it has *itself* done wrong in a particular and striking case ; then that *others* do wrong and offend their Maker ; and the general truth that God is displeased with sin, expressed in comprehensive terms, will *conclude*, and not *commence* the process. To impress a child then with a sense of its accountability to its Maker, we are first to convince it, that in one clear and decisive instance it has itself displeased God by committing sin. Let us suppose such a case.

A child quarrels with her younger brother at play. The mother interposes to quiet the contention, and then leaves them with a sorrowful countenance, which tells them that she is displeased, but without any direct reproof. The day passes away ; the child forgets the occurrence, and supposes that the parent has forgotten it.

When the evening approaches, and the calm and still hour which precedes the time of rest has arrived, and all the excitements of the day are allayed, and the mother, alone with her child, is about to leave it for the night,—she says, in a serious, but kind and gentle tone ; " My child, do you remember that you were angry with your little brother to-day, and that you struck him ?" The sin thus called to the recollection, will come up distinctly to view, and the fact that the mother remembered it so many hours, invests the transaction with an importance in the mind of the child, which no language could attach to it. The time and the circumstances too, in which it is recalled, open the whole heart to the impression which the parent desires to make. " God saw you do this, my child," continues the mother, in a kind but serious tone, " and he is much displeased with you. How can you go to sleep to-night, without asking him to forgive you ?"

There are few young children who will not be affected by such an appeal as this ;—who will not feel sincerely sorry for the wrong,—be ready to ask God's forgiveness, and to resolve to do so no more. If it appears that these feelings exist, let the mother express them, in a short and very simple address to God. She may then close the interview by saying, " Now, my child, God has heard our prayer. He knows whether you have *felt* what I have been saying. If you have, he has forgiven you, and he will love you, and take care of you to-night, just as if you had not done wrong."

A watchful parent will soon find, after such a lesson as this, an opportunity to convince the child, that to make good resolutions is not an infallible pre-



servative from sin. Another and another transgression will soon occur, and the pupil may be taught, by pointing to its own experience, that its own daily sins call for daily penitence and prayer.

Proceeding on the same principles, one religious truth after another may be implanted, by seizing cases in the child's own history which illustrate and establish them. This inductive method, so valuable in teaching any branch of knowledge, is peculiarly adapted to the inculcation of religious truth. The natural progress of the mind is from one particular fact to another and another of the same kind, and thence to the general law. The reverse of this—endeavoring to establish first the general proposition, and then to deduce from it its particular applications,—is much less fitted to impart knowledge, and altogether less for the purposes of producing an impression. In order to illustrate my meaning more fully, let me suppose one or two more cases.

"God is benevolent," says a Christian parent to her child. "He loves to do good, and he does good to all mankind, therefore you ought to be grateful to him." The effect of such general statements, upon the heart of a child, must be very vague and superficial.

"You are a great deal better this morning," says another parent, to a child who has spent the night in sickness and suffering. "Your fever is gone, and you seem to be getting well very fast. Do you know who made you so much better? It was God who pitied and relieved you, and we must thank him heartily, this morning, for his goodness." If then there is, in the morning prayer, a distinct and particular allusion to the case, coming from the father's heart, the child will be affected. In a few days, some other proof of the divine goodness towards *itself* may be pointed out,—then some of the most marked examples of his goodness to others; and thus a knowledge of the Universal Benevolence, which forms an unchanging trait in the divine character, will come *last* in the series of steps, and will be fully established only after a considerable time, and the presentation of many particular instances.

Let us take another subject;—the evil nature and tendency of sin. This described formally to the child, in general terms, will produce little impression upon the heart. But let the parent wait until some instance favourable for this purpose shall occur in the *child's own history*, and point out the operation of sin in that particular case; and she will perceive a very different effect.

Perhaps it will be falsehood: and after a little delay, and without any feelings of anger or impatience at the sin,—perhaps after it has been kindly and cordially forgiven,—let the mother point out its evil tendencies. "It destroys my confidence in you. I cannot believe you so fully when you speak again; it made you feel uneasy and unhappy from remorse for the guilt and fear of detection;—it displeased God; and unless you sincerely ask his forgiveness, he never will forgive you." After a suitable interval, present some cases in which the consequences of sin are strikingly displayed in the case of others,—the intemperate man, or the dishonest man,—and point out the consequences which guilt brings upon men in this world, and with which it threatens them in the next. Teaching thus from *particular cases* will have far greater influence in producing vivid and abiding conviction, than any *general* instruction, however simple and true.

The same principles are to guide you in explaining the deeper and higher subjects to which you will gradually advance. Be not, however, in haste to approach them. God delayed revealing fully to the human race, the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, for four thousand years. During this time, multitudes were doubtless saved by penitence and faith, rendered available by

an atonement of whose nature they knew nothing ; and we must remember that a child may be penitent, and may have its sins forgiven through Jesus Christ, long before it is old enough to understand those principles of God's government by which the way of forgiveness is regulated.

These principles are, however, to be gradually explained. Let us take one as a specimen. The necessity of a sovereign's requiring something more than merely the penitence of the criminal, before he allows crime to go unpunished.

If you say, "It was necessary that Jesus Christ should die for men, in order to satisfy divine justice, and maintain the majesty of the law ;" and explain the language as fully as you please, it will convey no idea to a youthful mind, and produce no impression. But take some actual case of real occurrence which brings this principle into view, and it will all be easy.

"Some wicked men went in the night into a chamber where an old man was sleeping, and killed him. They wished to obtain his money. They did it secretly, but they were discovered, tried, and condemned to die. While one of them was in prison, his wife, with her children, went to the governor, and begged and entreated him to pardon her husband. The governor might have pardoned him if he had chosen, but he would not. Do you think he was a hard-hearted man ?"

"Yes, mother," most children would answer.

"He was *not* a hard-hearted man. He was very far from it. He treated the wife and children very kindly, and told his friends that it made his heart bleed to see them, and to hear their entreaties. Can you think of any good reason why he would not forgive the poor criminal ?"

The children will be at a loss ; but the parent can, by the help of such an incident, give them, in a few moments, some very clear ideas on the necessity of a steady and efficient government, and of laws executed firmly, which will help them very much to understand how hopeless was our condition until Jesus came to save. The story of Dr. Dodd, the English clergyman, is admirable for this purpose.

But we must curtail these illustrations ; they might be extended beyond any limits. It is, however, to be observed, that in all these exercises, a constant effort should be made to cultivate a reverence for the Word of God, and a conviction that it is the guide of life. "It is not necessary that you should formally tell them that it is a sacred book, whose decisions are authoritative. It will produce a much greater effect if they see that you regard it so. Appeal to it constantly in all the cases of the kind which I have described above. When you inculcate a duty, show in what words *God* commands that duty ;—when you reprove for a fault, show what sentence God has pronounced upon such a transgression ;—and in all proper cases bring in the authority of *God's* word, in such a manner as to show that it is the foundation upon which you stand.

It is of great consequence that you pursue a proper course in endeavoring to interest your children in the study of the Scriptures. Upon a proper use of this volume every thing depends. There are some parts which children can at a very early age understand and appreciate. Others, from their style or subject, will act efficiently on mature minds alone. From the former, which ought to be early read and explained, an immediate and most important religious influence can at once be expected. Selections from the latter should be fixed in the memory, to exert an influence in future years.

For the former of these purposes the *narrative parts*, if judiciously selected, are most appropriate in early years. But, great care ought to be taken to select those which may be easily understood, and those in which some moral

lesson is obvious and simple. Let it be constantly borne in mind that the object in view in teaching the Bible to a child is to *affect his heart*; and it would be well for every mother to pause occasionally, and ask herself, "What moral duty am I endeavoring to inculcate now?" "What practical effect upon the heart and conduct of my child is this lesson intended to produce?" To ask a young child such questions as, "Who was the first man?" "Who was the oldest man?" "Who slew Goliath?" may be giving him lessons in pronunciation, but it is not giving him *religious instruction*. It may teach him to articulate, or it may strengthen his memory,—but is doing little or nothing to promote his piety. I would not be understood to condemn such questions. I only wish that parents may understand their true nature. If the real or supposed dexterity of the child in answering them is not made the occasion of showing him off before company,—thus cherishing vanity and self-conceit,—it may be well thus to exercise the memory; and some facts, which will be useful hereafter, may be fixed in this way. But it must not be considered as *religious instruction*;—it has not in any degree the *nature* of religious instruction.

What, then, is the kind of instruction which is to be given from the Bible? I will illustrate the method by supposing a case which may bring the proper principles to view. We will imagine the child to be two or three years old.

"Come," says its mother, "come to me, and I will read you a story." It is Sabbath afternoon we will suppose; the mind of the child is not preoccupied by any other interest.

"Sometimes," continues the mother, "I tell you stories to amuse you. But I am not going to do that now. It is to do you good. Do you understand how it will do you good to hear a story?"

"No, mother."

"Well, you will see. It is the story of Cain and Abel. Do you know any thing about it?"

"Yes; Cain killed Abel."

"Do you know why he killed him?"

"Because he was wicked."

"No, I mean what did Abel do to make Cain angry with him? Did you ever see any body angry? Were you ever angry yourself?"

"Yes, mother."

"And I suppose you had some cause for it. Now I will read the account, and see whether you can tell what made Cain angry. *And Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.* Do you know what the fruit of the ground is?"

"No, mother."

"It means any thing which grows out of the ground. Cain was a farmer; he planted seeds and gathered the fruits which grew from them, and he brought some of them to offer them to God. *And Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock.* Do you know what that means?"

The child hesitates.

"Abel did not cultivate the ground like Cain. He had great flocks of sheep and goats, and he brought some of the best of those to offer to God. So that you see that Cain and Abel did almost exactly the same thing."

"Now God does not notice merely *what we do*, but *how we feel*, while we are doing it. If I should ask you to go and shut the door when you are busy, and if you should go immediately, but feel ill-humoured, God would be displeased. He looks at the heart. Do you ever feel ill-humoured when I wish you to do what you dislike?"

"Yes,—sometimes."

"Now Cain, I suppose, did not feel pleasantly when he brought his offering, and God was dissatisfied with him. But God was pleased with Abel's offering and accepted it. Should you have thought that Cain would have liked this?"

"No;—did he like it?"

"No, he did not. He was very much displeased; and it is very remarkable that he was displeased, not only against God, but *he was angry with his brother*, who had not done him the least wrong. That is the way with us all. If you should do wrong, and your sister do right, and I should blame *you*, and praise *her*, you would be tempted to feel angry with her, just because she had been so happy as to do her duty. How wicked such a feeling is!"

"Cain, however, had that feeling; and little children have it very often. It shows itself in different ways. Cain, being a strong man, rose against his brother in the field and killed him. But young children who are weak and small would only strike each other, or say unkind things to one another. Now God is displeased with us when *we have these feelings*, whether we show them by unkind words, or by cruel violence. There is a particular verse in the Bible which shows this. Should you like to have me find it?"

"Yes, mother."

"I will find it then. It is in Matt. v. 22. Our Savior says it. It is this, *Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.* This is not the whole of the verse. I will explain the other part some other time."

The reader will perceive at once that the kind of instruction here exemplified, consists in drawing out the moral lesson which the passage is intended to teach, and in giving it *direct and practical application* to the circumstances and temptations of the child.\*

Go on in this way as your child advances through its earlier years;—inculcating thus practically the truths and doctrines of the gospel, by making each one a comment upon some portion of its own little history. Aim especially to make the feelings of the heart keep pace with the advance of the understanding. Judicious efforts of this kind God will bless, by leading the heart of the little one who is the subject of them to daily habits of communion with him. Christian influence is increasing its power over the young. Every year is carrying the banner of piety nearer and nearer towards the earlier years of human life,—and it is not impossible that it may hereafter be proved, that there is not a single hour in the whole existence of a human soul, so favorable to its conversion, as the hour when it is first able to understand that there is a God in heaven to whom it is accountable.

\* Parents ought at such times to make ingenious efforts to learn what thoughts and feelings are passing in the minds of children; for sometimes the whole tone and manner of the instruction is to be modified by it. Draw the pupil if possible into conversation. Encourage his questions, and try by every means to get a clew at the train of thoughts passing in his mind. The following anecdote illustrates the great diversity of emotion which is produced in different minds by the same narrative. Two children were looking at a picture of the murder by Cain. Abel's crook was lying upon the ground. After contemplating it a moment in silence, one says, with a thoughtful and serious expression of countenance, "I wonder if God could have made Cain as good a man as Abel if he had wished." Another pause;—and then the other said, shaking his head, and throwing into his countenance a look of stern defiance. "Ah, if I had been Abel, and could have got hold of that stick, I would have laid it upon Cain well." How entirely different, now, the course of remark, judiciously adapted to the condition of the latter mind, from that which would be suitable to the former.



## SERMON CVII.

1 SAMUEL, iii. 19.—*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him.*

WE have thus far considered the leading principles by which parents should be guided, in their efforts to affect, by religious instruction, the hearts of their children. But perhaps some one will say, it will require a great deal of time and pains, and more intellectual skill than I possess, to watch my child, in all its course, and thus endeavor to ingraft religious truth upon the events of its little history. It does indeed require time and pains; and God means that all parents should *find time*, and *take pains*, to train up their children. If, however, any of us are so engrossed in the business of the world,—in public life,—in eager efforts for wealth or fame,—or in pleasure,—that the home and the fireside are neglected, we must expect to fail. As to its requiring intellectual superiority, it is a mistake. It requires *only moral* superiority. The sincere and humble Christian mother, who is resolved to be faithful in duty, and who humbly endeavors to ascertain what duty is,—will, in all probability, succeed.

II. I come now to the second part of my subject, in which I was to present cautions against some dangers which lie in the way.

1. *Do not neglect to cultivate as highly as possible the amiable, affectionate, and honorable feelings which may adorn the natural character.* It is unwise to give the whole attention directly and exclusively to securing a change of heart. Improve, by all your ingenuity and skill, the natural temper and disposition. Cherish in your child feelings of respect and attachment to yourselves, kindness to others, and constant habits of cheerfulness and good-humor. There are two important reasons why you should aim at this. First, these feelings, if you succeed in implanting them, will assist you most powerfully in your efforts to keep the heart of your child accessible to the inducements which the gospel presents. If he has been so educated that he shrinks from the infliction of unnecessary suffering,—that he is pained to witness an act of injustice or oppression, by some little tyrant among his play-mates,—or that he is deeply grieved when he has incurred parental displeasure,—if such has been the education of your child, his heart and conscience will probably be, in all respects, tender. He will be more easily awakened to deep concern at the displeasure of God,—and will more readily and more cordially enter into the spirit of Christianity, which inculcates love to all mankind. It was for the possession, probably, of such qualities as these that our Savior loved the young man to whom he said, “*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*” There was a hope in his character and condition, which the case of the proud and hardened Pharisee did not afford.

These feelings, then, will render you much assistance in your religious instructions through the whole period of childhood and youth, if the grace of God should not renew the heart of your child in its earlier years. They will enable you to retain a strong hold upon it while it shall remain under your roof, when perhaps it might otherwise become insensible, long before its maturity, to any religious influence in your power to exert; and if it should go

forth into the world without having become reconciled to God, these traits of disposition and character will go with it,—keeping in some degree its conscience tender,—preserving it, in its intercourse with a wicked world, from being hardened so fast, and polluted so deeply, by the contaminations to which it must be exposed.

But there is another reason why the amiable traits of the natural character should be carefully cherished; and it is, that *they will contribute so much to the perfection of Christian character*, when that character shall be acquired. The growth in grace will be much more rapid; for some of the greatest obstacles to that growth will be removed. The influence exerted over others will be much increased. These traits of mind are in universal estimation among men; and they give to their possessor an access to human hearts which scarcely any thing else can obtain.

But perhaps some may say, Every one is convinced of the truth of these views, and so detailed an exhibition of them is not necessary. We fear that it is, in many cases, necessary. Many Christian parents, we believe, do very little to improve and perfect the *temper* and *disposition* of their children, but direct their efforts almost exclusively to urging upon them the duty of immediate submission to God. In such cases, if they fail for a few years in accomplishing their object, they find that the child is becoming gradually hardened against the influence of religious truth, while they have failed to secure any other hold upon it; and the case becomes one of the thousand melancholy instances, where the pious instructions of the parent are followed by no apparent fruits, but the inveterate vices of the son. If at last God should bring such a child into his kingdom, half his Christian effort is expended in struggling against dispositions and habits, which have become inveterate by so long an indulgence, and which will remain, through life, a weight about his neck, and a thorn in his side.

Great care must be taken, however, to avoid leading the child insensibly to suppose that these feelings are all which are necessary to prepare him for death and the judgment. Your children must distinctly understand, that to be kind and gentle and compassionate are duties which we owe to one another; and that God claims something altogether beyond this from every heart.

2. *Be not too eager to have your children say, that they hope they have commenced a life of piety.* To present religious truth to a child, so as actually to influence its mind and its heart is one thing,—and to have the child *describe*, in his own words, the extent of that influence is another, and a much more difficult thing. It is much more easy to produce the *feeling*, than to draw forth an *expression* of the feeling. This is a distinction which is too seldom made. We often weary our children with the subject, or alienate their hearts from it, not by the fidelity of our religious instructions, but by pressing them too eagerly for an admission that they feel their force. The human heart, especially in youth, shrinks from a description of its feelings, and we should not, by requiring the effort, increase the obstacles with which the path of youthful piety is already filled.

But you will say, If my child feels any very strong interest in the subject, he will be willing to lay aside that reluctance, and talk with me freely about it. True; but suppose the interest he feels is not very strong. Will you rudely quench the smoking flax? or will you gently fan it to a flame?

3. *Be not too ready to believe that your children's hearts are changed.* You cannot know this, with any certainty, for many years. It is best that you should not. If you were to be fully satisfied on this point, you would relax

your efforts, and diminish your watch and care. Thousands of instances have occurred, where parents have been deceived by specious appearances, and have reposed their hearts fully on hopes of their children's piety, which time has only blasted and destroyed. If your children express strong interest in religious truth and duty for a time, be pleased with it; but place little confidence in it. If they continue for months apparently under the influence of Christian principle in their conduct, you may hope,—but never feel,—that their salvation is sure. The feeling of security can do no good, and may do much injury.

4. *When you have once cherished hope of your children's piety, be very slow to abandon it.* If they begin at all to love God, they will doubtless wander from him again: And their wanderings will be very much exposed to your view. Expect this, then. Calculate that, even if their hearts are really renewed, they will say and do on many occasions what would be decisive evidence of want of piety in a maturer mind. We are deceived on this subject from not taking sufficiently into view the difference between the youthful and the mature, in respect to the incautiousness of their conduct. A Christian of middle life will wander very far from God, while his external conduct preserves the habits which long-continued previous piety has formed. The child acts as it feels at the moment;—he manifests openly and without restraint the indifference or the unholy passions which the middle-aged Christian only feels.

5. *Take care lest the influence of your example or of some of your measures of government, should encourage evil principles in the hearts of your children.* The influence of parental example is very seldom fully appreciated. We notice it in infancy,—but we gradually forget it in maturer years. Children spend the first few months of existence in gazing with a bewildered look upon the objects which surround them,—then they begin to imitate what they see. At first they catch and repeat every little external act and personal habit; but, as years advance, the disposition to copy leaves the exterior, where it is apparent and almost harmless, and goes within. The inward character is controlled by its powers; and thus a change, which gives it tenfold importance removes it from the view, and causes it to be forgotten. The child of eighteen months mimicks the motion of your hand, or the expression of your countenance,—but at ten years, it adopts the principles of your conduct, and imbibes the spirit of your heart.

Be very careful, then, not to neutralize the effect of your instructions by an example of a contrary tendency. You can teach any thing easier by example than by precept,—and you can teach sin, in any way, more easily than holiness. If, therefore, you encourage the former by your own conduct and character,—and inculcate the latter by cold instruction only,—your child will march with double rapidity down the descent. You will teach him more fretfulness and impatience, by a single irritated look or hasty word to a domestic or to your children, than you can eradicate by many moral lectures on the advantages of a calm and contented spirit. Make a remark which shows a disrespectful or irreverent feeling towards the Word of God: it will catch the attention of your child, and penetrate his heart like an arrow; and your cold instructions will endeavor in vain to close the wound.

The efforts, however, to set the child a bright moral and Christian example must be honest efforts. See that your hearts are right, and then let your conduct fairly represent your hearts. The attempt to keep up good appearances merely, will certainly fail. We cannot deceive children long in regard to our real characters. We may exhibit false appearances of piety, or of benevolence or of honesty, to our neighbors;—we may deceive our pastor,—we may

deceive the church ;—but we cannot long deceive children, who are in daily and constant intercourse with us. They watch us at all times ;—see us in every unguarded moment. The tone of voice and expression of countenance, which we did not notice, speak volumes to them. Let us not therefore spend our time in watching our *conduct* and *words*. We will watch our *hearts*. We will keep them right, and learn not to *seem* patient under the ordinary vexations and trials of life, but to *be* patient. Our children will easily discover it, if we are so. In a word, parents must *actually be*, in heart and life, what they wish their children to be. Be as kind and amiable yourselves as you wish them to be. Be as fretful, and impatient, and cold-hearted in religion, as you wish them to be. What you do cordially they will imitate, and the spirit which really animates your heart, they will easily imbibe.

Be careful also that the spirit of all your measures of government be such as to promote and not retard your moral and religious influence. Let your instructions be always well timed.

When your child is strongly desiring an indulgence, his heart is so engrossed with the desire, that persuasion and reasoning have no effect. Unless the indulgence is of such a character that you are willing he should try it, and experience its ill effects, you must *command*, not attempt to persuade. Let me illustrate my meaning. A boy comes to his mother for permission to go out into the street to play during the evening.

"No, my child," says the mother, "I had rather you would not go. They are bad boys, and you will learn bad habits. I think you had better stay in."

"But, mother, I do not think they are bad boys. William and John are there, and I don't see why I cannot go."

"They use bad language and are rude. Besides, it is cold. I don't think it would be pleasant for you to-night. I think you will be much happier if you stay in with us."

"Why, mother, if they use bad language I will come away. They are going to have a fine game, and I want to go very much."

Thus there is a protracted discussion which probably ends in the victory of the boy. The mother does not perceive that all her arguments are entirely nullified by the boy's strong desire for the indulgence. That completely intoxicates him. It is perfectly idle, at such a time, to attempt to convince him. He is blinded completely ; and the only proper course is to say mildly, but firmly, "No, my child, you must not go." "Why not, mother? I want to go." "I cannot tell you why not now. I will talk with you about it another time." Then let the mother wait until her son has spent some evening happily at home, and just before he retires to rest, while his conscience is at peace,—and his mind predisposed in favor of domestic duty and happiness,—let her point out to him the reason why she keeps him from the circles of pollution and sin.

Let all similar requests for sinful or dangerous indulgences always be decided by authority and not by persuasion, unless, as was mentioned above, you leave your child to decide for himself, that he may learn from experience. This, however, ought to be done very seldom, and with great caution ; or else you will find that while you were endeavoring to disgust him with the *evils* of sin, you will have been hardening his conscience against its *guilt*.

Be perfectly honest and sincere with your children at all times. It is truly surprising to what an extent there prevails, even in Christian families, parental dishonesty. How many threats which were never really meant to be executed ! How many promises never designed to be fulfilled ! There are some subjects upon which parents seem to feel privileged to practise every art of deception

and falsehood. I will take as an example of the rest, the administering of medicine in sickness.

"Come, my child," says the mother, bringing the nauseous potion,—“here is something good for you.”

The child shakes his head, and turns murmuring away, showing by his conduct, that his mother has often told him similar falsehoods before.

“It is good—and you must take it, or else you will not get well; come, take it quick.”

The child still refuses, and the parent after a feeble struggle gives over the contest; inwardly resolving to accomplish, by secret artifice, what she has failed of doing by an open lie. Sugar, and sweetmeats, and pleasant drinks are resorted to to disguise the bitterness of the medicine, and every means taken to induce the little patient to receive the necessary remedy. But the child, who has hardihood enough to disobey a command, will generally have cunning enough to detect artifice, and he will contrive to keep the family in suspense for hours, while he eludes every effort to deceive him into an inadvertent compliance with parental wishes. It is truly affecting at such a time to see, by the looks of suspicion and distrust with which every approach of his parents is regarded, that they have so often deceived him that his confidence in them is entirely destroyed.

But the question will arise, “What shall be done in such a case?” Be open and sincere, and trust to your *authority*, not to deception. “My boy, here is some medicine for you—bitter medicine; I am sorry that it is necessary for you to take it.” If he demurs, bring in the authority of a command; and if that should fail, settle the controversy at once by a mild and calm, but decided appeal to force. If your previous management is what it ought to have been, this last will not be necessary, unless the child is very young; and a few examples of authoritative decision on your part will soon make him as docile and obedient on a sick bed as in any other scene. You say, perhaps, that it is very hard, when one you love so tenderly is writhing with pain, or perhaps in danger of death, to thwart his wishes, or add to his suffering. This is true; and duty is in many other cases very painful; but it must be performed.

This case where deception is so common I have taken only as an example. Be honest, and sincere, and scrupulous in fulfilling your word in all things. Never issue a command and annex to it a penalty with the expectation that the fear of the penalty will be enough, and that you will consequently not be obliged to execute it. Children will generally try you once or twice, to see if you are in earnest. Never make a promise without seeing how you are to fulfil it, and always fulfil it to the utmost,—cordially and readily. Never disguise the truth in any way—never underrate evils which your children have to bear, or difficulties with which they will have to contend—and never exaggerate the advantages which you have procured for them, or the pleasures of the course which you wish them to pursue. Be open and honest in every thing; you have, or ought to have, authority to command;—why will you then ever resort to sophistry to persuade?

6. Above all things, *be honest and sincere* in your efforts to promote the piety of your children. You can do nothing without sincere piety yourself. The mother who endeavors to impress her children with a feeling of gratitude to God, because she coldly thinks it her duty, will fail. Instead of gratitude, she will excite only weariness and loathing. But if the feeling itself glows in her heart, it will readily kindle up in theirs.



But perhaps some of the parents whom I am addressing are unreconciled to God themselves. They have children whom they are commanded to bring up to piety. If sincere and devoted piety in the parent is an indispensable requisite, what shall they do? It is a hard question—a very hard case. An individual is placed in this world of probation, and God says to him or to her, "Come, and be mine, and in a few years I will call you to a home of perpetual peace and happiness." The beings thus invited hesitate,—look upon the world—upon heaven,—linger a little, and then decide against God, and begin to walk deliberately on in the downward road. They have proceeded for some distance on this awful descent, when a helpless dependent one is committed to their care. They take him by the hand, and lead him on. He knows not whither he is going. He loves his parents—confides in them—and believes fully that they cannot lead him into any danger. He clings, therefore, closely to them, and walks heedlessly on. But the parents feel not entirely at ease; a mother cannot, under such circumstances, if she at all understand them. They accordingly hesitate a moment in their course, and then try to send back their child. They give it religious instruction—they teach it the Bible, and send it to the Sabbath-school, in hopes that it will be prevailed upon to return, while they go forward in the road to ruin. What madness! Stop, infatuated parent, stop! Seek God yourself, and your child may perhaps accompany you. But he will not enter the "strait gate," if you go on in the broad way.

III. Some general considerations, urging you to fidelity in duty, will close these discourses.

1. *God has placed in your hands an influence over your children which is almost boundless.* We underrate this power. You observe that your child has some fault which you endeavor to remove. Persuasion, entreaty, punishment—all perhaps fail, or secure only partial success; and you say, "How little influence have I, after all, over my child." But you forget that there is an influence of conduct and example as well as of precept, and that very probably, by your own previous neglect or sin, you may yourself have riveted the chain which you now strive in vain to break by a word.

We can see the influence of parents by observing how national characteristics are preserved from generation to generation. The population of Turkey, of China, of New-England, and of every savage island, will in one hundred years be slumbering in the ground, and their places will be filled by others, who will all be substantially alike when they enter the world. The millions of infants who are to compose the next Turkish generation will not, *as infants*, differ from those who are to be our descendants in this happy land,—or from the future throng which will fill the Chinese empire,—or from the babes which open their eyes in the wildest hut or wigwam. And yet how certainly will every one of these classes, as they come forward into life, receive the traits of mind and the characteristics of their fathers. How certainly will the next generation in Turkey be substantially like the last, and China in the twentieth century be like China now, unless some extraneous cause comes in to produce a change. The power of parental influence is almost unbounded.

2. *The influence which you now exert upon your children will react, after many years, with prodigious power upon yourselves.* It is natural that in early life parents should have no conception of the extent to which their own peace and happiness are placed in their children's hands. See that infant: weakness and helplessness itself, it has scarcely strength to sustain its own tottering footsteps, or courage to look without agitation into a stranger's face; dependent for every want, and completely submissive to every command, it can scarcely

be said to have a separate existence. It knows nothing—it does nothing, but through parental permission; and if there is throughout the world an instance of complete, unlimited, absolute power on the one hand, and most entire and helpless submission on the other, it is to be found in the empire which such a parent holds over such a child.

But how long can such an empire be maintained? The child advances with an irresistible progress up through the years of childhood and youth; and as it passes on from year to year, the ascendancy which you held over it melts away. One band after another, with which he had necessarily been bound, must be loosened, or it must be broken. You cannot stop the progress of years; you cannot check the advance to maturity; the mind of your child will expand beyond your grasp; the powers of the being, once so helpless, will rise slowly, but irresistibly above your control; and he will, ere you are aware, stand forth mature, independent, and free,—to carry forward with an impetus which you might once have guided, but which now you cannot stop, his course of happiness or suffering; to bring down upon your own head the blessings or the curses which you have taught him to procure.

It must be remembered, too, that the bonds by which you are bound to your children,—and through which any fidelity or unfaithfulness which you may now exhibit will return with tenfold power upon your own head in future years,—you cannot sunder. You cannot, should you ever desire to do it, banish affection from your heart. You cannot say, when hereafter he comes to a course of sin and suffering, I will leave him to his own chosen way, and be myself indifferent about his joys and sorrows. No; the cord which binds you to him is too strong. God has fastened it; and the more his wayward propensities may pull upon the knot, the tighter it will be drawn. Even his death will not sunder it. You will linger over his grave; and busy memory will bring back to you the long passed scenes through which you may have accompanied him. The neglected duty will come up again to view; the indulgence which ought to have been denied will reproach; the recollections of unfaithfulness will sting; and, on the other hand, the severity of affliction will be assuaged by the remembrance of all your sincere and earnest efforts to do your duty, and to prepare your departed child for heaven.

3. You will be excited to fidelity in duty by *looking forward frequently to your approaching separation from your children*. The ties which bind you, however closely, to them, must soon be sundered by death. You must, before many years, see them deposited in the grave, or you must bid them farewell, while they stand weeping around *your own* dying bed. They may be summoned first; and you will find, as every bereaved parent well knows, that mourning for their loss is the bitterest cup of sorrow which you can drink. You may have wept for other friends before; you may have followed your own beloved parents to the grave; but, in the emphatic language of an afflicted father, you will find “*parental* anguish more deep and keen than *filial*.” At such an hour, you will need consolation; and nothing will have greater power to assuage your sorrow, than the recollections of your past fidelity, in training up your child for heaven.

If these efforts have been made, and have been attended by the ordinary blessing of God, your child may give evidence at a very early age of his affection for his Savior, and of his preparation for another world.

But although you may survive your children, they will probably survive you. You will have to leave them in a world of temptation and danger, with no sufficient protector, unless you can have secured for them the protection of a

friend above. When your last hours are passing, and the world begins to recede from view, its various ties will, one after another, be sundered and broken; but, after all others are gone, the bond which connects you with your child will still cling. That link will be the last to be severed; so that when you are willing and desirous to leave every thing else that is earthly, your heart will still linger about your fireside, and affection for a beloved child will make you cling to life. How happy will it be for you at such a time, to feel that God will be a parent to the orphans,—and that you separate from them only for a time. If your faithful instructions have instilled the principles of piety into their hearts, you can have this happiness; and you can with peaceful resignation commit them to God's care, assured that he will be their supporter in the temptations of life, and their refuge in its storms.

Let these thoughts dwell with you to encourage and to strengthen you in your present duties. While you are making strenuous and faithful efforts to improve the character and strengthen the moral and religious principles of your child, be encouraged by the assurance, that long after these struggles shall be over, you will think of them and dwell upon them with pleasure. On the other hand, remember, that if you set it an example of sin, or act in your management under the influence of indolence or irritation, consulting present convenience, without attempting to follow any fixed principles,—Oh, remember, that though an act of unfaithfulness may be over in an hour, its memory will last, and it will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.

And now let me ask how you are fulfilling the trust reposed in you? When you are surrounded by the family circle, of which God has made you the center and the support—when you are seated at your fireside, with those loved ones whom God has committed to your charge, looking up to you for guidance, and example, and instruction,—do you feel the responsibilities which God has laid upon you? Do you preside over those committed to your care, as if you were hoping and expecting to present them at last before the throne of God, that they may be admitted with you to the happiness of heaven? Or is God a stranger in your households? Is the day commenced without asking his blessing; and do you extinguish your evening fire without acknowledging the goodness and mercy by which you have been preserved? In a word, are you training up children for heaven? or are you doing all in your power, by your example and your neglect, to make them neglect God, forget the judgment, and suffer life to pass away, without preparation for the scenes at its close?

A word, before I close, to children. You see the greatness of the load of responsibility and care which God has laid upon your parents. Will you lighten the load, or will you add more and more to its weight, until it presses down your father or mother to the dust. Oh! help them. Be dutiful and affectionate; remember their many labors for you with gratitude; listen attentively to their instructions; and help, by your interest in religion, their own progress in piety. Thus will you smooth their paths here, and be united with them in perpetual peace and happiness hereafter.